

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 5 MAY 2019: "BODY BAG"

Our fifth issue "Body Bag" considers a question asked by this month's featured artist Jill Bergantz Carley: "How do we assess the value of a person?" Follow our poets through their explorations of self-worth and their resilience in saying, "I'm here."

This month's featured poet is Alexandra Corinth.

Issue 5 includes work by Anthony AW, Prince Bush, Alexandra Corinth, Sam Frost, Akif Kichloo, Samantha Lamph/Len, Sarah Law, Courtney LeBlanc, Emitomo Tobi Nimisire, Darby Ratliff, Juliette Sebock, and Rodd Whelpley. And Danielle Hale is featured in "What We Carry" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Jill Bergantz Carley who makes her home in Northern California on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, where she lives a half mile from the stoplight in a sweet town five blocks long. A Pushcart nominated poet, her work is forthcoming from *OPOSSUM*, *ENTROPY*, *Silver Needle Press*, *Collective Unrest*, and elsewhere. She's shown her textile work recently in the DeYoung Museum, bG Gallery, DTLA, CTRL Collective, and elsewhere. She tweets @jbergantzcarley & lives online at jillbergantzcarley.com.

Jill's work "Body Bag" is an artwork from a series; originally its creation coincided with the deployment of troop surges in the Middle East from 2006-2008. Jill has begun revisiting this work in light of current events in our own country; who is disposable? What does respect look like before & after death? How do we assess the value of a person? It is comprised of the following materials: Knitted & hand-sewn work; regulation-sized body bag knit from fiber created from reclaimed trash bags; plastic, cotton thread, acrylic zipper.

"boutique sad" by Anthony AW

I've walked the streets
thru ethereal day &
solemn night. Kiss'd beauties
to feel pretty. No
love, for people notice

postcards of waterfalls&
mannequins'n New York shop
windows. There's me. Mannequin
has twisted posture&
wears raw denim with
chunky sweater. Shallow death
catches me wondering if
the clothes run as
small as I've known.

["An Angry Poem \(In the Voice of Bigotry\)" by Prince Bush](#)

i love my american made
slaves. for justice, the mandatory
judicial, a mandatory
minimum for blood-thirst, man-made
law. i hate how they hate
Him, the almighty Him
who finishes off each son
for flexibility and freedom
we finish off black sons
cause even He kills
someone off
and even he killed
someone off

what makes america
is a mother's
death, a dead or not dead
namby-pamby pushed out, abortions
aborted, babies born
through ripped raped walls still
deported

for america
you can see it
i want you to see it
and repeat it
word for word
what makes america
is the miracle:
of strong slaves who do
for america

i want you to see it
and repeat it
what makes america
is the miracle
of starry-eyed, star struck
natives
who word for word
made us out to be
miracles

now all stand for the jail
system, we make bars off the jail
system, we add barbs by the jail
system, we auction off elections for a pork chop
sandwich, we switch the offers, we vote often
for a border border bar black brown barred
system

now all stand for the pledge
allegiance, to the flog
of every united, minority
of america

“Language Barriers” by Alexandra Corinth

A man sits next to me on the subway
in a Subway restaurant
on a park bench in September

what do I say to his hands
hungry for skin and my quiet open mouth

our fingers do not speak the same language
or I am bilingual and he listened to his father

where does my *body* become invitation
why does he read it as *welcome mat*

if I scream as if stung will he die in my palms
or will his voice rise over mine until I am no longer sorry

I am a mouse lucky and desperate
and he, glorious beast fang and fur

blesses me with a smile

before swallowing me whole

no stray bones or hair

clinging to his teeth

no blood or grit or bile

staining his jaw

all the broken pieces held

inside my skin

He stands beside me on an elevator

at an art gallery

in line at Starbucks

and I learn to see the feasting before he smiles

learn how to run

how to never look

back

Alexandra on "Language Barriers":

Like many women, I have experienced a formative amount of harassment throughout my life. In places as “expected” as a public transit to the less expected fast food restaurant, men have approached me as strangers and friends to appraise my body.

This has become even more common since I first started using mobility devices. Chronic pain has shaped my life even more than the decades-long commentary – I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2017, though began experiencing symptoms at age 13, and await genetic testing to confirm a connective tissue disorder. The unsolicited feedback I receive now is no less invasive, but significantly more “socially acceptable” – inquiries into my health status, challenges to my need for a mobility device, and “jokes” that jab at my very identity.

When discussing this behavior, I have always felt like I am speaking another language, something that only those who have been harassed in this way understand. The narrator of the poem says “I am bilingual” because she can understand what her harassers are saying, but they cannot understand her when she explains why their words do not make a compliment.

I wrote the final stanza from a place of sadness – it is a reflection on a realization that I fear most men now, even the ones I know. Places that were once just places now feel inherently unsafe. This isn’t something that I am proud or happy about, but I see as an understandable defense mechanism developed in response to years of hurt. The narrator says, “I learn to see the feasting before he smiles,” and my heart breaks for this version of myself – that I don’t give many men a chance to prove me wrong, to be different.

The final two lines are broken as they are – “how to never look/back” – to try to leave the outcome ambiguous. Is the narrator not looking as she is devoured over and over again, or has she already run so far that she can’t finish the thought before the line breaks, or does she really

not look back? I don't know the answer to that. I'm interested to see what readers of *Kissing Dynamite* think.

EIC Christine Taylor on "Language Barriers":

Alexandra's poem "Language Barriers" spoke to me immediately because I routinely find myself in situations where my body is objectified: people take liberty touching my hair, running their fingers over my tattoos, staring closely at piercings and asking if they hurt. I remember once telling someone how offensive his gestures were only to receive some quip about being an attention-seeker with the way I look.

I love the way Alexandra employs spacing and line breaks in this poem--the journey through the text mimics the confused, broken, hyper-vigilant feeling one has when trying to navigate the dynamic of protecting the body and the self while simultaneously seeking space to exist.

["A Poem for Someone Else's Pain" by Sam Frost](#)

I see my family lined up in a hallway, dark gray
walls & wooden chairs & they look like chickens
waiting for their morning feed with big eyes
all anxious & Mom's mom wrapped in blankets
as Mom paces back and forth the same way
she did at the funeral & the old woman in all black
who pounded Mom's chest & said she had to stay
alert, who said she looked like she was about to
pass out & Mom's chest bruised the next day
& our fridge full of pity food left to grow mold

This is all after the ski trips & after the pool day
when my cousins got caught making fun of Dad's
rules all "Stevie don't breathe! You're breaking
rule 137" so I see their faces young & tear-streaked
at the burial & my aunt holding their hands & her
own tears dangling at eyelash ends & dad's truck
being sold & all his clothes boxed & donated &
Mom staring at the ceiling as I sleep on Dad's side
of their bed & Mom's dad hauling his lawn mower
to our house & Dad's brother putting a swing set
in my backyard & everyone trying & trying & trying

I see the kitchen counters unwashed & clothes
piled on the bedroom floor & Mom & I stuck in bed
& our tears & how they wouldn't stop as days
passed & weeks passed & months & each image

is a picture, is makeshift creation— a fraud— made from story after story & I never ask for memories because I feel like a thief of sorrow trying to build up my pain & Mom says I asked “Are we gonna cry again today?” & she knew we had to stop & happy days followed & followed & that’s all I know

“Secretly I Am a Mathematician” by Akif Kichloo

(I)

Secretly I am a saint.

I fuck but *never* procreate.

Subtraction > Addition

When I was a child I found the trick to multiplication

$9 \times 1 = 10 - 1$

$9 \times 2 = 20 - 2$

$9 \times 3 = 30 - 3$

you see how subtraction is an easier pursuit.

(II)

When I started learning the Urdu alphabet *alif bay pay tay* (ا ب پ ت)

I always forgot to recall the letter پ (*pay*).

My father thrashed me so hard I screamed

alif bay pay tay, alif bay pay tay, alif bay pay tay, for weeks in my sleep.

Like a split heartbeat. A sound of disease. *alif bay pay tay, alif bay pay tay, alif bay pay tay.*

Years later I learnt the letter پ (*pay*) is absent in the Arabic language.

(if you have to write Pepsi in Arabic you write Bebsi instead.)

You see *Absence* *Effortless to learn*

Subtraction *Easier*

(III)

Easy is سهل (Sahal) in Arabic, Urdu, and Kashmiri

Which becomes آسان (*Aasaan*) in Persian and Hindi (आसान)

Which becomes (Āsāna) in Punjabi and again اسانه (Āsāna) in Pashto.

All *seven* languages my ancestors spoke at some point until

I subtracted them down to just one.

(IV)

Sick men are hung to

death because it is said that death

by hanging is death by humiliation.
Every time a man is hung by his neck, his manhood swells to an erection.
During partition so many men were hung, all anyone ever saw
was floods. *Do these look like additions?*

Millions of faces that never aged *subtraction*
So many children growing up without fathers *subtraction*
My father slapping me senseless *unrelated but still subtraction.*

(V)

In our house there was a tradition
Children behaved like grownups and grownups behaved like children.
There is no way to remember how I felt the day I was born
but I cannot forget the day I couldn't place the letter پ (*pay*) that day I ripened.

“Deafening” by Samantha Lamph/Len

I've bided my time,
binded the years,
pressing those days
into a decade
I can barely remember
as I live it.

I've accepted that I may never mature
past age twenty-one,
the year two thousand and ten,
when you pinned me, face down,
gripped my hair in your knuckles
--your fist
at the scalp--
& threw your wrench
into my mental machinery.

I've hemmed
& hawed, analyzed
each nightmare
& fantasized

the primal,
savage satisfaction:
bringing justice
into my own

two hands

the blood they could take
in fistfuls, not enough fingers to count
all the infinite ways...

And I've considered every consequence,
the collateral damage, and how it might compound
when an eye for an eye becomes
an eye for an eye for an eye for an

I don't care who has to go blind.

I've stayed quiet
so long I don't remember
the sound of my own voice, don't remember
when to scream,
or how or why why
why me?

But when I do,
it will be so loud

you won't hear me coming.

"Moon" by Sarah Law

*They keep sending those men
up to the moon; my mother
blames them as the forecast blares –*

for her, it was barely weeks ago
that Armstrong took his leap; now
she too stumbles in an altered gravity,

its sandstorms unpredictable as love.
No wonder there are craters,
tunnel-black that trap and

stretch her back to a time-lagged past:
my mother the waning moon; still bright
as long as my light can hold her.

“Butcher” Courtney LeBlanc

I told him before our clothes fell
to the floor. He insisted he didn't
care. Later, after we showered,
he tells me he hates blood,
how disgusting it is, how I've ruined
his sheets. I tell him of the butchering
my father conducted each year,
the slicing of the cow's throat, its scream
drowning in the warm blood
that gushed over my father's hand
as he held the head back.
I tell him of the peeled hide,
the meat sliced from bone. I detail
the organs I later cut into chunks
for the dog – the liver, the kidneys –
both thick with blood. I don't stop
describing till all blood drains from
his face, hand over mouth
he runs to the bathroom. When I leave
I don't look back.

“Porcelain” by Emitomo Tobi Nimisire

I am thorns and petals too alike they are one
a breed with nectars beasts and butterflies suck
I am all that was when what I wanted to
be is anything but what I have become
-- am becoming

a porcelain with a temper, falls and shatters
into clay that couldn't hold roots
so it was made to home a soil tender to seedlings
an ocean tired of running
but can't get a grip on its turbulence

I am the fading image my mother's eyes blur out
when she visualizes god running to her rescue
the headlamp on the temple of my father's spirit
on nights he comes visiting.

“The Big Bang, a Redux” by Darby Ratliff

I get coffee with my ex
every Friday, and this time
the bruise on my thigh
balances painfully on the chair’s
edge. This bruise—by the way,

it looks like the universe,
changing and shifting
blues and purples and greens, flecks of
white, injured skin like stars,
created like how I imagine the galaxy was—

by accident. I fell on the porch,
slipped on ice and snow,
the universe forming in an instant,
and when I roll on it
in my too big bed,
I feel the universe, pulsing.

“Standardised Testing” by Juliette Sebock

Did he hit you?

How the hell else will they explain it
when you’re in a hospital bed
and they ask what happened and you say

My boyfriend—

*[but he’s not my boyfriend and he
made that clear but now I’m here
and it’s his fault]?*

It’s easier to say yes

but you can’t with your tongue
between your teeth

[better than against his]

and your mouth hungover from him

sucking out bits of you and
replacing them with pieces of his.

No.

Because somewhere you somehow
still feel like you owe him—
a defense, silver lining, or a fine line at the edge of normality.
Honesty, but tinged with lies and
everything you still try to hide
for your own protection or his or—

[I could show you the scars if I weren't so ashamed.

No.

His fingers gripped too tight but

He didn't mean it.

No one can act that well.

No.

His hands didn't leave marks

but his mouth—

No.]

[“Mesa at New Year” by Rodd Whelpley](#)

Heat travels, but my feet don't know it.
The cold of the of the Arizona patio burns
into blisters newly opened by the wrong shoes
on a rocky desert trail. It took until December
to fly from home to Mesa:

A week to watch
the days grow longer, stare across the condo courtyard
through neighbors' windows, their high def screens
tuned to CNN.

Another child – a boy – has died
in custody.

He knew no higher government
than following his mother, at night pausing

on a puddle-shaped rock by a cactus, its warm
oozing through his toes into the dark, black
as his hair and every bit as undeterred
by starlight or things his father claimed
white folks would say.

He knew for all of them
the words for please and thank you, the word
for water, but instead drank dry the blood
of his cracked lips, hot as Christmas bourbon
in my glass.

Surely, there was an uncle somewhere
in a suburb of Chicago, a baggage handler or butcher
at a factory in Iowa.

Must have been work ready
for his mother at a restaurant in Ottumwa or
with a tax-preparer cousin in Ohio, anticipating
more place settings for the seasons, louder songs
at birthdays, barbeque, screaming meemies and M-80s
on Independence Day, high school football, his family
seated next to mine, feeling a post-harvest chill
against which we've all prepared, by half time
fully covered, my wife beside his mother, striking up
a friendship, admiring the fabric of their blanket,
its pattern, its color.

How toasty it must be.

A few words from Rodd on "Mesa at New Year":

I can only assume that pairing this poem with a photo from an exhibition called "Body Bag" will explode the final image of the family's blanket in a deeply awful and perfect way. Frankly, my biggest fear for the poem is that it ends with such a Pollyanna-like image. Of course, had that family been cared for and allowed asylum in the U.S., the cultural exchange would likely never have been as simple and sweet as the poem imagines, and I worry that the last scene's idealization of what might have been softens the actual, real horror of what is - of how we (as represented by our government) would rather allow asylum seekers to die than be given a chance to live up to our ideals and their hopes. Our government is not giving us (current citizens) the chance to live up to our ideals as the people of the country that welcome families from other nations, allows those new families the space to live the ordinary, beautiful lives so many of us get to live largely by accident of where and when we happened to be born. That is certainly a juxtaposition I hope the poem suggests.

“What We Carry”

From EIC Christine Taylor: The violence of colonization has left a devastating wake of loss. In her poem "Blood Anxiety," **Danielle Hale** explores the anxiety caused by the loss of language and the importance of passing on cultural traditions.

“Blood Anxiety” by Danielle Hale

Me

anxious blood metallic like water from copper bowls
mathematically the least while still mixing
red in a sea of white foam cells

and traditions stuffed hungrily
down my throat remembering taste of sweet
grass and cedar remembering

smoke rising toward Kookum
reaching down to stroke tear-streaked
cour-age gathered in shaking hands that know
not everything or sometimes nothing

raised palms out to remember
to learn to earn to gather to know
more than mothers but always less less less;

dancing on roots through beaten
grass steps small but stronger stronger
stronger, traditions flow through like blood until

they become me which becomes

You

who travels metallic foamy sea
bursting: all traditions no blood

belonging to no one and everyone teaching me
as I learn you the taste of my blood in the cedar

Danielle’s Commentary on “Blood Anxiety”:

The other day, I saw a post on Twitter that got me thinking about the languages I should be able

to call mine—Ojibwe, Cree, and Michif—but which I don't actually speak. I do know a few words and phrases in Ojibwe and maybe a handful of words in Cree and Michif, and I use them as best I can in my poetry (for example, the hyphen in "cour-age" is a play on the French/Michif word for "heart"), but the loss of language can cause a lot of anxiety, as can the loss of culture. I come from cultures that were almost wiped out by settlers and colonizers, and the attempts have never been accidental. People know about the movement onto reservations. They know about smallpox blankets. But fewer people know about the Indigenous women who underwent forced sterilization for completely unrelated medical issues into the 1970s, or how our people—mostly women—have been disappearing for much longer than the MMIW movement has existed. There's a long history of trauma that's been passed down to me, and I carry that with me.

But I also carry traditions and teachings that were almost lost to my family. My mother knows more about our traditions than her mother did, and I want to learn more than either of them, not to one-up them or be better than them, but so I can pass those things down to my own children when I have them. That's what this poem is about: passing traditions and teachings to the next generation, even though my siblings and I are the last ones in our immediate family to be legally considered Indigenous. I married another Anishinaabe, but our blood quantum (the amount of Indian blood we possess) don't add up to enough for our children to be enrolled members of a tribe, too. And because of that, they will have to rely solely on culture, not blood or legality, to understand where they come from. "Blood Anxiety" is a lament of that loss, but it's also a love song—a promise—to my future children: that I'm going to do my best to ensure they have a strong understanding of their cultures and what it means to be Indigenous.

Poet Biographies

Anthony AW (he/they) is an LA-based writer. Their work has been or will be published in *Boston Accent Lit*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, *Mojave He[art] Review*, & *Rogue Agent*. His micro-chapbook, *Pantoum'd!*, will be published by Ghost City Press for their 2019 Summer Series. AW's a part of the Pink Plastic House 2019 summer online residency. They host tête-à-tête, a queer reading series in Highland Park. @an__o__

Prince Bush (he/him/they/them) is a poet majoring in English at Fisk University. Find out more about him, including publications, at <https://pbush.com>.

Alexandra Corinth (she/they) is a disabled writer and artist based in DFW. Her chaplet, *DEUS EX DIAGNOSI*, was published by Damaged Goods Press in 2019. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Philosophical Idiot*, *Barren Magazine*, *Entropy*, *SWWIM*, and *Glass: Poets Resist*, among others. She is also an editorial assistant for the *Southwest Review*. You can find her online at typewriterbelle.com.

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Sam Frost is a writer living in Los Angeles. She spends her spare time eating bagels and drinking green tea, and she does most of her writing in her phone notes. Find her on Twitter @ sammfrostt

Danielle Hale (she/her/hers) is an Indigenous poet who grew up off the reservation but, because of a persistent mother and a thirst to know herself, is constantly (re)learning what it means to be Anishinabekwe/Metis. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in North Dakota Quarterly, The Broken Cassette, and The Citron Review. She has been nominated for the Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. Danielle holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of North Dakota and currently resides in Wisconsin where she teaches writing.

Twitter: @DanielleHale1

Akif Kichloo is a poet of Indian origin currently alternating residence between Saginaw, Michigan (USA) and Kashmir, J & K (India). With a bachelor's degree in Medicine and Surgery, he has been eating shoelaces for the past year because he gave up everything to write poetry. Currently signed with Andrews Mcmeel Publishing for his book of poems *Falling Through Love* (November, 2019)

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Samantha Lamph/Len is a writer and cat masseuse in Los Angeles. She is also the creator of [Memoir Mixtapes](#), a literary journal that brings our love for music and writing together in one medium. You can read more of her work in wonderful places like *Occulum Journal*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, *Connotation Press*, and *Queen Mob's Tea House*. Find her online at www.samanthalamphlen.com or follow her on Twitter @quandoparamucho.

Sarah Law lives in London, UK and is a tutor for the Open University and elsewhere. She has published five poetry collections and her pamphlet, *My Converted Father*, was a Poetry Book Society 2018 Winter Selection. She runs the online journal [Amethyst Review](#). Follow her on twitter @drsarahlaw .

Courtney LeBlanc is the author of the chapbooks *All in the Family* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Violence Within* (Flutter Press), and a Pushcart Prize nominee. She has an MBA from the University of Baltimore and an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte; you can find her publications on her blog: www.wordperv.com. She loves nail polish, wine, and tattoos. Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

Emitomo Tobi Nimisire's comma life was messed up by Strunk & White and Mary Norris. She writes from Ibadan, Nigeria. She blogs at www.nimisire.wordpress.com. Find her on Twitter: @Nimisire.

Darby Ratliff (She/Her/Hers) lives in Buffalo, New York where she splits her time between traveling, writing, and eating tacos. This is her first published poem, though she released a novel in verse under a pseudonym in early 2019.

Juliette Sebock is the author of *Mistakes Were Made* and has work forthcoming or appearing in a wide variety of publications. She is the founding editor of *Nightingale & Sparrow*, runs a lifestyle blog, “For the Sake of Good Taste,” and is a regular contributor with *Marías at Sampaguitas*. Currently, she is curating the *Screaming from the Silence* anthology series and working on a variety of personal and freelance projects. When she isn't writing (and sometimes when she is), she can be found with a cup of coffee and her cat, Fitz. Juliette can be reached [on her website](#) or [across social media](#).

Rodd Whelpley manages an electric efficiency program for 32 cities across Illinois and lives near Springfield. His poems have appeared in *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *2River View*, *Star 82 Review*, *Barren*, *The Chagrin River Review* and other journals. *Catch as Kitsch Can*, his first chapbook, was published in 2018. Find him at www.RoddWhelpley.com. On Twitter as @RoddWhelpley.

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